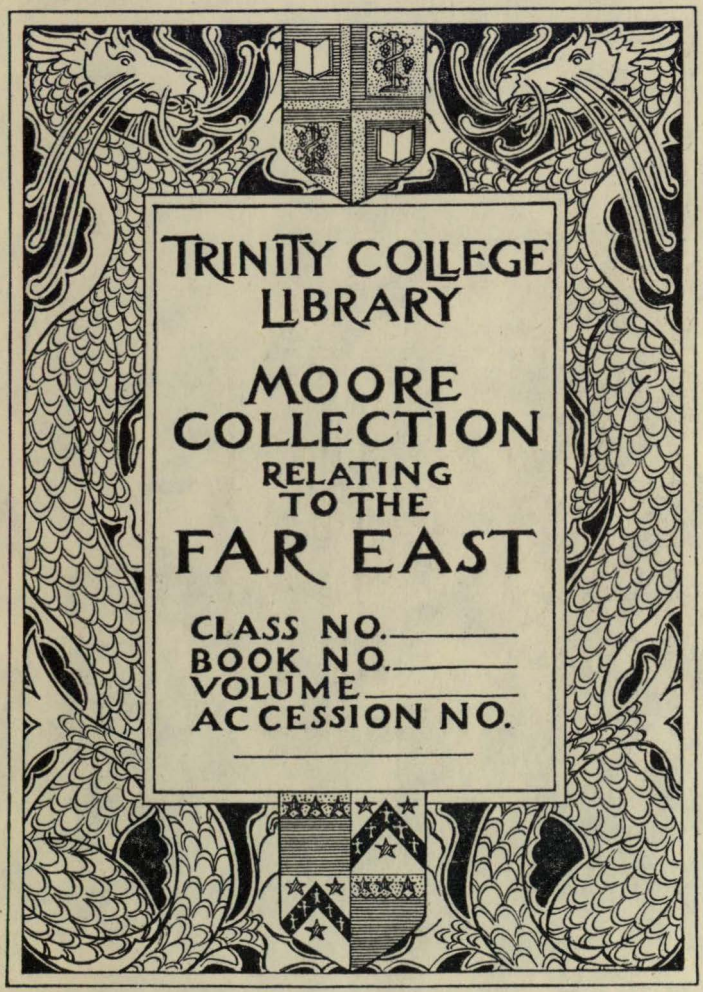

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Mrs. Reuben Lowrie

An Appreciation

BY MAUD A. MACKEY, M. D.



"MOTHER LOWRIE"

WOMEN'S BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Room 818, No. 156 Fifth Avenue, New York

Price, 2 cents each; 20 cents a dozen

[Translation of the inscription on a brass tablet in the Paotingfu church.]

China and America. A Union Memorial.

The Beautiful Example of Mother Lowrie.

Mother Lowrie, the mother of Pastor Lowrie of this church, was widowed in youth, and brought up her children in the truth until their maturity and the coming of Pastor Lowrie to proclaim the Gospel in China.

His mother accompanied him, and impossible is it to tell the number of her good deeds. We especially recall in the year nineteen hundred and four, when Pastor Lowrie returned to America in ill health, his mother cared for him on the journey, herself past seventy years of age. In the homeland, she might have remained in ease and retirement, and, had her faith been weak in the slightest degree, never would she think of returning to Paotingfu.

Had she not returned, our Pastor, though restored to health, would not have consented to part from her and return alone; but her heart was firmly fixed on our Paotingfu, and a year later she brought our Pastor back with her, saying to us on arrival, "This time I will not return to America, but shall die in Paotingfu. When I meet people I will talk of nothing else but Jesus." And now, as we recollect her, it was even as she said. More wonderful was it that in her life's evening time and in sickness, her countenance wore no sadness and her diligence knew no rest. Enter at any time and she was either writing, or turning the leaves of a book, with a genial expression that made people wish to draw near. What is called "cultivating to perfection the likeness of Christ," is this, is it not? Indescribable! Do not forget her!

In the year of our Lord's advent 1909.

Inscribed by all the Christians.

Mrs. Reuben Lowrie

("MOTHER LOWRIE")

AN APPRECIATION, BY MAUD A. MACKEY, M.D.

TO all who knew her, the name of Mrs. Amelia P. Lowrie will bring to mind a picture of a woman with a glory of white hair, a bright, happy face, and a presence of indescribable charm, which compelled those who saw and heard her to listen eagerly. Many hearts can trace to her simple, natural talks about her life in China, the first awakening of interest in missions, or the quickening of an interest grown cold.

Her bright sayings and merry ways at sixty often made her friends wonder what she must have been at sixteen. Throughout her life she entered keenly into any enjoyment, but from early childhood the deep sense of spiritual things kept her heart true and seeking first the Kingdom of God.

A young Chinese woman loves to relate the following story of Mrs. Lowrie's childhood. She was greatly impressed by the statement of her Sunday school teacher that little girls in China knew nothing of the Lord Jesus, but that Christian children in America could help to send them the Gospel, by giving a few pennies a week. Speaking to her father of her wish to give something to help in this work,

she was told by him that any offering she made should be of her own money. After much consideration, the child decided to go without butter and to give the money thus saved to the little girls in China. She persevered in this for two years, and received the money to send to China. Her aim was to do good, not to practice self-denial, for she greatly enjoyed the double portion of butter when staying with her aunt, who said, "When visiting it does not count!"

In her girlhood she was thrilled by the reports of the life and work of the Rev. Walter M. Lowrie, who afterward suffered a martyr's death at the hands of pirates in China. When his younger brother, Rev. Reuben Lowrie, who was at work among the Indians, decided to give his life also for the Master in China, and asked her to accompany him, she was prepared to go. Fearing that she did not realize what was involved, he explained to her that it meant leaving home and friends and much that was dear to her, as well as a long, long journey. He advised her to take time to consider it carefully, but she quietly replied, "I have."

On the long journey by sailing vessel around the Cape of Good Hope (1854), she had many days to think about the step she had taken, but always with a sweet content and never a regret. The journey was a wonderful experience to her. She used to speak with reverence of a deep spiritual searching she had, alone on the deck of the ship, when God spoke directly to her soul and she went through the

terrible darkness of a sense of sin. Then came the joy of perfect salvation, which gave her a new knowledge of her Saviour and prepared her heart for the life into which He was leading her.

The memories of the years when work was so new and life so different from that in China to-day, sounded like a romance as she lived them over again fifty years later. Into the home in Shanghai came her three little ones, two sons and a daughter. Her youngest boy was born the day before his father was taken away, but he received his blessing, and was given his father's name. His mother used to say that she always felt that the little child had come straight from heaven to comfort her heart.

Her sister, who had missed her sorely at home, had come out to visit her in China, and was with her as she took the journey home again with the children. This was one of the many proofs of the loving Father's care and provision for her comfort. Another was the good captain of the ship, who showed great kindness to the little voyagers, in whom he was so interested that, after a lapse of forty years, he still remembered them.

When Mrs. Lowrie reached America, her little home was already waiting for her, and beginning her new life, she bravely faced all the problems which came to her in rearing her children. One of the memories of their home on the Hudson which these children held most sacred was of the mother "morning by morn-

ing, after breakfast, retiring for communion and refreshment of heart and always returning with countenance radiant with the looking unto Him."

She longed to see her children go as missionaries, but never told them so, only constantly prayed that they might be prepared and called to the work that she loved and lived for. She always kept plenty of missionary literature within their reach, so that they might be prepared when the call, which she confidently expected, should come. The first "call" came to her youngest son, Reuben, who was early taken into the presence of his Lord. In the midst of her grief and the thought that perhaps his life might have been saved if she had used other means for his restoration, there came the direct message to her from God's Word—"Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death," and she was comforted and satisfied.

A few years after this (1883), she had the joy of returning to China with her oldest son, Rev. J. Walter Lowrie, and her daughter, who afterward became Mrs. B. C. Atterbury, living in Peking many years and then in Paotingfu. "Well, she will most everlastingly stir them heathen up!" exclaimed a friendly boatman of Bayhead, New Jersey, when he heard that at fifty she was going to China. Perhaps the boatman was right, for wherever Mrs. Lowrie went there was a stir of interest among young and old. Her unusually attractive appearance first won attention, but no one was satisfied with a single glance only at the bright, happy face beneath the crown of white hair.

She studied the Chinese language, and used it, as she always welcomed the people into her home and talked with them. It was not only the Chinese whom she "stirred up," for fellow-missionaries often remarked that Mrs. Lowrie was the youngest person in the compound. She knew that "all work and no play" would soon unfit people for the very work that they longed to do most faithfully. So if she saw a new missionary too closely tied to her books, her quick step would be heard on the walk and her cheery voice at the door, and there she would stand waiting, with tennis racquet, or grace-hoops, or an invitation to walk. These walks were sure to be delightful, for only pleasant subjects were discussed. Older missionaries, too much absorbed in their work, found themselves gathered about her table, engaged in cheerful conversation or spending the evening in games, which were made most interesting by her own thorough enjoyment and delight.

A missionary who, with her husband, spent the first part of her life in China in Mrs. Lowrie's home, speaks of the privilege of being so closely associated with her, and of how often her cheery whistle would resound through the house, driving away feelings of homesickness and discouragement. She tells also how Mrs. Lowrie was always helping the poor Chinese, feeding the beggars, exhorting the wayward, and teaching the ignorant. One old woman came daily, leaning on her staff, and after reading for an hour, was rewarded with a biscuit. In time, her heart was made new

and she lived a Christian life, some time later suffering martyrdom under the Boxers.

If one were ill, Mrs. Lowrie's visit brought sunshine and left something pleasant to remember. Hers was a hospitable home. She sought out strangers and their welcome was genuine. Only rarely did her guests prove disappointing. Upon one of these occasions, the visitor was boastful of his success as a Christian worker, and spoke disparagingly of the character of a great man of whom Mrs. Lowrie had read with much admiration. She found such an offense hard to overlook, and when the self-sufficient guest was mentioned a few days later, she took occasion to relieve her mind. When, in answer to her remarks, she heard from across the table, "But, mother, he was used of the Lord," quick as a flash she replied, "Yes, and so was Balaam's ass." One of her strongest characteristics was her sincerity and abhorrence of all pretence and sham or cant. She was true through and through. Her friends were never in doubt about her opinion of their ways or ideas, but underlying her criticism was always a kind motive in a warm, loving heart, and her wit, mixed with her frankness, often sent them away amused as well as thoughtful.

The months spent in America were filled with the same spirit of helpfulness and testimony for the Master and the work in China. The accounts she gave were always interesting, often thrilling, but always true to the missionary life as she knew it. She very wisely refrained from urging or even asking young

people to choose the mission field for their life work, but she was faithful in presenting a true picture of the work, which, doubtless, was often used to call those who heard.

In the year 1900, she planned to spend the summer in America. When she left Shanghai, only rumor told of the approaching peril, but before she reached San Francisco the storm had broken over North China. When in San Francisco during the Boxer terror, while she read the blood-curdling reports in the daily papers, and her thoughts were often with her son across the sea in the midst of such dangers, her trustful spirit kept her heart staid upon God, so that her serene and even happy conversation brought the remark from an acquaintance, "Why, you talk as if you thought God really lived."

Before going home to America the last time, she spoke of the possibility of not being able to return, "because," she said, "after seventy, one must expect to see signs of the taking down of the tabernacle." These signs began to appear while at home, when she found it painful to write, because of swollen hands (she was a rare letter writer), or, as she expressed it, there was "a small agony when she moved," due to rheumatism. She liked to quote, "Man is immortal till his work is done." Hers was not yet done; so China received her back for a stay of two beautiful years.

So active had she always been that it was hard for her to sit still in her chair, unable to trip about wherever she wished to go, but her manner gave no hint that it was hard.

She was always cheerful and planning cheer for others, always interested in the work or the lives of those about her. It was the custom to bring to her everything of interest, not as to an invalid to pass away the time for her, but to a friend who was always glad to hear and sympathize.

And so her helpful life went on, bearing others' burdens in prayer and interest, and giving cheer and hospitality to many as she had always done, but never allowing others to feel the burden of her pain while she was being made perfect through suffering. She said that the Bible became more and more precious to her, especially the Old Testament treasures, as she spent many hours reading. She remarked one day, "How much I should miss if I could walk! I should be running about looking after things in the home, and we get on just as well." But though she could not walk, she was able to attend church services and other gatherings, being carried in her chair.

At Paitaiho, the little seashore retreat where many missionaries in North China spend their holidays, she passed the last month of her life, a beautiful, happy summer, with her many friends. She was carried regularly to the Sunday services, and also to the sessions of the Annual Meeting, in which she took the keenest interest. It was her pen that wrote the Station Report for Paotingfu that year, and it was her voice lifted up in prayer that closed the last session of the Mission Meeting. Soon after this, after a short acute illness, she

fell asleep on September 17th, 1907, in her seventy-fifth year.

When the casket was taken from the train at Paotingfu, many of the Chinese who loved her were there to join the procession, which wound its way through the streets to the church in the compound, the church that was often called, lovingly and respectfully, by the Chinese of the city, "The old lady's church," because of her. A simple service was held in Chinese and many loving words were spoken.

A very remarkable proof of the respect of the outside people for her was the solemn hush upon the people on the streets as the procession passed. They stood quietly, seemingly realizing a little the loss to Paotingfu. The next morning her friends followed the casket to the Martyrs' Cemetery, and her body was laid in the compound, where she had lived and worked before 1900, and where those who had once shared her life and work had died in that year.

A stone was erected to her memory by the non-Christian Chinese of the city, showing their love and respect for her. The Christians' feeling is so beautifully expressed in their own words by the inscription on a brass tablet that was placed in the church by them, that a translation of it will be interesting. But after all we can say, we must still join them in the last sentence of their inscription, "Indescribable! Do not forget her."



Monument to Mrs. Lowrie in Paotingfu Cemetery